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Smoke Alarms Fire Department Installed Save Older Couple

State public health and public safety officials came to Groton today to honor the Groton Fire Department and the Council on Aging for their efforts to install smoke alarms. Their efforts recently saved the lives of an older couple.

Christine Farrell, Residential Fire Injury Prevention Program Coordinator at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) said, "The Groton Fire Department and the Groton Council on Aging, by their partnership and efforts, have made an important contribution to protecting the lives of the residents of Groton."

On May 24, 2004, the entire state shuddered as front of ferocious thunder and lightening storms swept through the region. Mr. and Mrs. John Fowler of Gay Road were as frightened as the rest of us, especially when they heard an unfamiliar sound. They soon discovered it was a battery-operated smoke alarm the Groton Fire Department had recently installed in their basement and their basement was full of smoke.

The couple escaped their home, made a bit more difficult because Mr. Fowler uses a wheelchair, and called the fire department. It seems that lightening had struck the home and caused a fire in the basement. While the fire itself was contained to the basement, deadly smoke had filled their house by the time the fire department arrived.

Fire Chief Bosselait said, "While we hate see anyone have a fire, we are so happy the Fowler's made it out safely. We are certain that these smoke alarms saved their lives."

Massachusetts Residential Fire Injury Prevention Program

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) in partnership with the state Department of Fire Services has a program offering free smoke alarms to fire departments and community agencies who work together to identify at-risk individuals and families in

need of smoke alarms, such as elders, families with young children and immigrants and refugees. The alarms are installed and the resident receives fire safety education at the time of the installation. A follow-up visit is made six months after the installation to assure that the alarms are still functioning. The *Massachusetts Residential Fire Injury Prevention Program* is funded by a grant from the U. S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. O date, there are twenty-eight coalitions around the state.

Groton Fire Department Teamed Up with Council on Aging

The Groton Fire Department teamed up with the Groton Council on Aging for this smoke alarm project. The Council on Aging helped to advertise the program and find seniors who might have no smoke alarms or non-working alarms in their homes. Members of the Groton Fire Department volunteered their time to install the detectors and to provide fire safety education at the same time. They also follow-up six months later to make sure the detectors are still working.

Smoke Alarms Are the First Line of Defense

Working smoke alarms can double the chances of surviving a fire. They are your first line of defense because they will give you the earliest possible warning of danger and time to use your escape plan. Smoke alarms should be installed on every level your home and outside the sleeping areas.

Older Adults at Double the Risk of Dying in a Fire

According to the Massachusetts Fire Incident Reporting System (MFIRS), people over age 65, account for one-third of the fire deaths each year in Massachusetts. Older adults (>65) are twice as likely to be a fire victim than other age groups; they account for 14% of the population but 29% of the fire deaths.

Jennifer Mieth, Public Education Manager for the Office of the State Fire Marshal said, “In 2002, over three-quarters (77%) of civilians died in the “safety” of their own homes. The majority of these victims died at night, while they were sleeping and did not have working smoke detectors. It is also important to remember that detectors only provide an early warning of a fire. They do not guarantee an escape. It is important to make and practice an escape plan.”

Make and Practice Your Home Escape Plan

Chief Bosselait said, “No one thinks fire will happen to them, and all too often people are caught by surprise without a plan that gives them two ways out of every room and a meeting place outside.” He added, “In a fire your job is to get outside fast and stay outside. We have the protective gear, specialized equipment and training to locate anyone trapped inside.”

Smoke Detectors

- Install smoke detectors on every level and outside each sleeping area.
- Test smoke detectors monthly.
- Replace the battery twice a year.
- Never disable your detector.
- Replace detectors every 10 years.